# Acknowledgement


ter-National Cultural Centre wishes to thank The Imperial Tobacco
ny of India Limited for their valuable help in bringing out this
ntative collection of Folk Paintings of India Also the generous
n received from them makes it possible for the Inter-National
al Centre to publish this volume in its present form

*ction was made with the help and advice of* Dr Moti Chandra, *Director, Prince of*
*useum of Western India, Bombay*, Dr Verrier Elwin, *Adviser for Tribal Affairs,*
*nt of India, North East Frontier Agency, Shillong*, Prof D P Ghosh, *Curator,*
*Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University*, Sri D G Kelkar, *Raja Kelkar Historical*
*s, Poona*, Sri Karl Khandalavala, *Bombay*, Sri Rai Krishnadasa, *Hony Director,*
*ala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University*, Sri Tinkari Mukherji, *Art Section, Indian*
*Calcutta*, Dr Vikram Singh, *former Secretary, National Museum of India New Delhi*
M L Sinha, *Secretary, Bangiya Sahitya Parisat, for general guidance and the permission*
*luce from the collection of Acharya Jogesh Chandra Museum of Vishnupur Branch of*
*iya Sahitya Parisat We also record our gratitude to* Dr A Aiyappan, *former*
*ndent, Government Museum, Madras*, Dr Kalyan Kumar Ganguly, *Lecturer, Calcutta*
*y*, Sri C J Jeydev, *Curator, Anthropology Section, Government Museum Madras*
K Mishra, *Curator, Chandradhari Museum, Darbhanga*, Sri Krishna Chaitanya,
*on Officer, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, New Delhi, and* Sri P R
*n, Curator, Archaeology and Art Section, Government Museum, Madras for their*
*suggestions*

rier Elwin *kindly contributed the foreword "Folk Paintings of India"*

# Folk Paintings of India

*by Verrier Elwin*

Comfort is so strange and wonderful a thing to the masses of mankind that simple men everywhere have explained its presence in their hard lives as a special gift from the gods There is a famous story of a very ugly girl, so ugly that no one would marry her When she died frustrated and miserable, her soul went to God who looked on her with pity and asked her what He could do to console her 'Send me back', she said 'in my next birth as something which all men will desire'. So God made a plant grow from her grave, it was the tobacco plant, whose leaves the whole world loves, and millions and millions of men now kiss with their lips the once unattractive girl in her new form This story is a parable of the belief of the folk in transformation and re-creation which is the secret of art, something so exciting that it can only be described in theological terms

So, in one Buddhist tradition, God seeing men dull and flat, sent clowns to cheer them up elsewhere God taught women to weave, and showed them how to draw inspiration for their patterns and designs from natural things — the wings of butterflies, the markings on a snake, the ripples on the surface of a mountain stream, the interlacing of leaves and branches against the sky, the colours of the rainbow God put the tool into the wood-carver's hand He gave the brush to the village painter At the early stage all the arts are one, and the designs of basketry, the patterns and colours of hand made fabrics the ever varied form of clay, the vigour and realism of carvings in wood or stone the rhythm of the folk dance are allied to painting

This book explores the art of the folk painter of India It does not pretend to be a comprehensive treatise that would have required a decade of travel and re search It is rather a journey, an adventurous journey through little known and often remote areas whence the traveller has brought home surprising and delight ful treasures such as the very fine Mithila designs, the exquisite 'Todi Ragini' from Kulu, the four wonderful pictures from Rajasthan which alone make the book

worth having the unexpected astrological paintings and the delicate Ladies at a Lotus Pool from the south

This book is a sign of India s new and always growing concern for her anonymous multitudes it takes us back to a day when the artist was not someone isolated a professional but when everybody as in parts of village India even now was or could be an artist

A great merit of this book is that it relates the paintings to the traditions and setting of the people who made them Here history sociology and geography meet in a fruitful alliance The architectural wonders of Orissa appear in the *pats* of Jagannath the ceremonial temper of Banaras is obvious in the paintings on the walls of its houses The art of Rajasthan grew out of a princely warlike and chival rous tradition Gujerat businesslike and shrewd is appropriately represented by a Market Scene In a painting from the Buddhist areas of the North East Frontier we see the fantastic imagination of a people who live among great mountains and the vast forces of nature

In colourful Bengal the artist seems to have sought relief in sober subdued tones in bare and arid Rajasthan he found contrast in exciting colours The Himalayan painters liked soft powdery shades The Santal pictures are bright and simple well adapted to their purpose to cheer up their little cottages

Folk painting depends of course to some extent on the availability of appropriate materials In Uttar Pradesh the smooth whitewashed walls have provided a large canvas In the Saora hills of Orissa the walls are washed with a red clay and the paintings therefore are done on this in white and black In Assam however the walls of village houses are generally of cane or bamboo so wall painting is not found there instead a tradition of painting on pith came into being an unlikely medium which has most unexpectedly attractive results And there is painting on leather on stiffened newspaper on pottery or cloth

It is I think unsound to distinguish too sharply between court and temple art and the art of the folk For the courts of long ago were not like the Royal Enclosure at Ascot, they were homely places where the people loved to come and their atmosphere inspired the village home The temple too was a centre of the people s interest and even today simple Buddhist temples in north east India some little more than huts of bamboo and thatch enshrine carvings and paintings of great beauty and are the centres of dramatic and pictorial creativeness as well as of religion

It sometimes happens specially in Orissa that the artist works from inherited blue prints and some of his work is that of a copyist Yet such blue prints help the tradi tion to resist the ravages of time and the original beauty which would otherwise have perished long ago is thus able to survive

Since Independence there has been an exciting revival of the creative spirit throughout village India but painting still lags behind the other arts I wonder why this should be so One reason is undoubtedly the lack of patronage and that is why a book of this kind is so important I hope that copies of it will find their way into the villages for it should do much to re create the folk artist s self respect to see his creations reproduced so beautifully and treated with the honour they deserve Then there is the competition of the cheap oleograph the commercial calendar the gaudy mythological reproduction the political leader in bad print These are not only easy to obtain but they have the false prestige of modernity and the village artist becomes haunted by a sense of inferiority and ceases to create Indeed it is this inferiority complex that is the castrator of the artistic impulse in every field and unless we can encourage the villager to believe in himself the folk arts which cannot be kept alive by merely artificial stimuli will perish

Art teaching where it exists at all in the village schools tends to be stereotyped and uninspired The dreary examples of jugs and chairs make no appeal to a child s imagination Yet wherever free drawing is allowed and practised good results are obtained and the example of the child artists of Carrolup in Australia and the success of experiments in West Africa have shown that once children are encouraged to draw and paint things they love things that are deep in their tradi tion they can do well

I believe that a revival of folk painting is possible The age of commerce the ugly girl of the folk tale will be reborn as something that men will desire that will give them comfort and happiness This rebirth will be of beauty for which the heart of man craves.

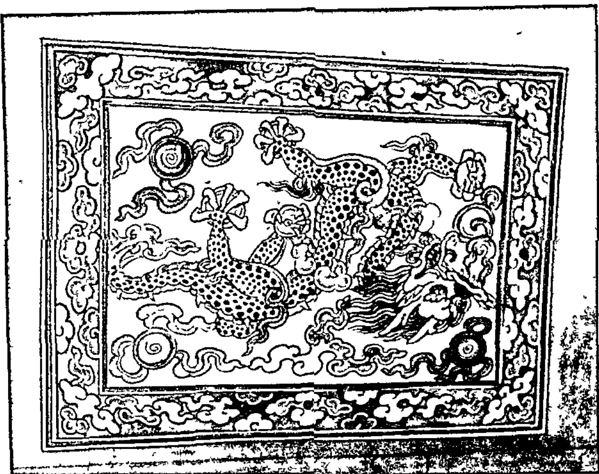
Thus the folk paintings in this book are of supreme importance Some are alive with magic Some are the text books of history Some mark the great incidents of life birth growing up death Others prophesy the future or reveal man s dreams of the other world suggest the wonder and possibilities of love and take us to a never never land populated by splendid animals heroic men and lovely girls

# From the North-East

A wild mountainous country spread like a giant horse-shoe between the Himalayas to the North and the Brahmaputra Valley to the South — the North East Frontier Agency is the home of at least 25 distinct tribes with considerable divergence of cul ture In Western Kameng the westernmost division of the Agency on the boundaries of Tibet and Bhutan, live the *Monpas* — a gentle, courteous people deeply influenced by Buddhist ideals They cultivate on ter races, weave colourful carpets paint deli cately on wood and wooden vessels and turn out on ceremonial occasions in picture sque brocade costumes and headgear

Buddhist religious scrolls are fairly com mon in the Monpa country, and the dragon painted on wood is a representative example of Monpa art The theme is a traditional Buddhist one the dragon in any case, has close resemblance to his next of kin on the other side of the Himalayan barrier

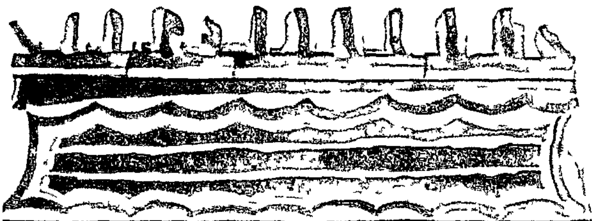
Towards the South West across Bhutan are the districts of *Kamrup* and *Goalpara* in Assam and Jalpaiguri in North Bengal where the rainfall is copious and natural drainage defective Reed grows in abun dance in the many swamps and it is left to the native genius of the Malakars and *Solakars'* to put it to good use They carve out the solid reed or join the different pieces together to make images masks and toys birds and interesting animal forms



*Monpa Painting on Wood, NEFA*
*Courtesy Dr Verrier Elwin*

They also scoop out the pith to paint on it gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon, and characters from religious as well as profane legends — the distinction between the two is not always clear

'Manasa Mangal is a favourite theme — 'Manasa', apparently the deity of the snakes, is the central figure with a whole host of subsidiary characters thrown in The lines are bold and the colours used on pith soak into the surface to give it an over all soft tone which is the special charm of paintings on pith The demon on pith is from 'Manasa-Mangal', so is the angler whose quaint 'European' headgear is the artist's favourite device to signify an out landish character



*Painting on Pith Goalpara Assam*
*Courtesy Asutosh Museum of Indian Art Calcutta*

# A Living Tradition in West Bengal

In Bengal, painting as a popular medium of cultural expression developed in comparative independence from the conventions of a temple art, and free from the influences of a royal court In the painted scrolls and 'pats' of rural Bengal we have in fact, one of the few genuine folk traditions surviving down to the present century In the villages of 24 Parganas, Bankura, Birbhum and Burdwan, one still meets the 'patuas', selling their pats' — small, squared up illustrations — at village fairs or entertaining the unsophisticated rural audience with their 'jarano-pats', literally, rolled paintings

Painted usually on paper of the cheapest variety — sometimes even on old news papers — the 'jarano pats' average twelve to fifteen feet in length and are one or two feet wide Apart from popular mythological stories, the theme sometimes is a condemnation of social injustice, ending with a picturization of hell and of the evil-doer being tortured in retribution The pictures on the scroll are arranged in rectangular panels, one below the other As the scroll is gradually unfolded, the 'patua' sings explanatory ditties of which he is often the composer

Primary colours — yellow, red and blue — are generally used by the 'patua' sometimes also green and brown, all laid in flat washes Hot tones are always avoided and



*Playing Cards from*
*Vishnupur West Bengal*
*Courtesy Prof D P Ghosh Calcutta.*



*From an illustrated Ramayana manuscript, Midnapur, West Bengal*
*Courtesy Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta*





*'A Nobleman and 'Gauranga Nityananda'*
*Two 'pats' from Kalighat, Calcutta*
*Courtesy Indian Museum, Calcutta*

the overall effect is profoundly quiet Some of the 'pats', particularly the early Rama yana rolls, remind us of temple murals in colour and composition The classical Indian modelling quality of the line is however, absent

The line drawing asserts its claims as a powerful medium of expression in the works of the folk artists from Kalighat who originally produced their paintings for mass sale to pilgrims thronging to the Kali temple The 18th and the early 19th centuries were the golden age of the Kali ghat artist The entire family participated in the execution of a painting even the ladies were as dexterous as the men

The Kalighat patua worked on religious subjects later antagonized by the grow ing influence of the English and French artists of the day, he made his art a power ful instrument of satire to mock at western ization To compete with cheap prints imported from Europe and to cater for the new 'aristocrats' of 19th century Calcutta,



*Rama and Hanuman From an Avatar' scroll Vish upur West Bengal Courtesy Jogesh Chandra Museum Bangiya Sahitya Parisat Vishnupur*

he even distorted his art and produced some banalities Lithographs from Germany had ruined him completely by the turn of the century

Of the paintings reproduced here one is from an illuminated Ramayana manuscript executed towards the end of the 18th century The illustrations were the work of Midnapur artists The Krishna Lila is a modern effort while the Avatar scroll and the playing cards — representing perhaps a tradition of 1200 years — are from the Faujdars of Vishnupur — hereditary artists some of whom are still living and painting the old way



*'Krishna and Milkmaids'*
*Part of a 'Krishna Lila' scroll,*
*Midnapur, West Bengal*
*Courtesy Sri Benoy Ghose, Calcutta*

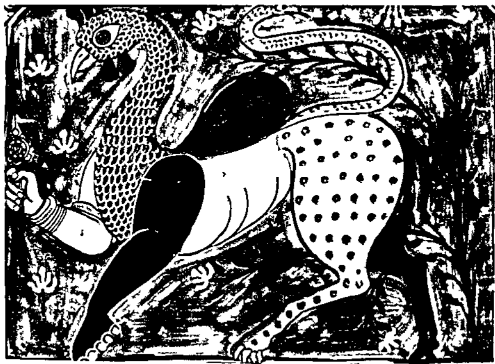
# 'Pats' from Puri

Orissa in Sanskrit is Utkala Desa' i e the Glorious Country Puri on its south-eastern shore is *'the City'* — abode of Jagannath the Lord of the Universe

To Puri for centuries have flocked devout Hindus from every corner of India The pilgrim had to take back home a suitable memento — a Jagannath pat was the obvious choice This would remind him of the Lord as He stands with His sister Subhadra and brother Balarama in the inner sanctum — Garva-Griha'— of the great temple These 'pats' were supplied by the 'Maharanas', hereditary chitrakaras' (artists) who lived — as some of them still do — close to the temple precincts



*'A Lady with a Violin'*
*A 'pat' from Puri, Orissa*
*Courtesy Prof D P Ghosh, Calcutta*

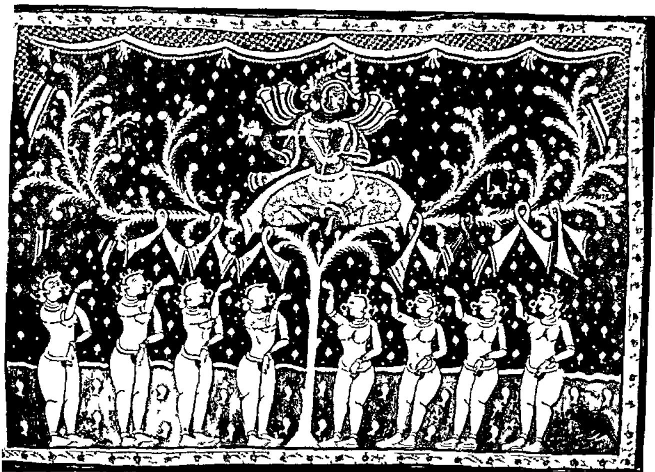


*'Sharaza' — a 'pat from Orissa*
*Courtesy Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta*

A simple Jagannath pat' would perhaps satisfy the majority of the pilgrims The rest would demand something suggestive of the temple arabesque, its architectural splendour and the classic lines of its carved figures To satisfy them the artist had to wed successfully the art of the miniaturist with that of the mural painter This probably explains why a 'pat was often designed in a big way, and yet finished with such decorative splendour

For ages the artist was governed by conventions and based his paintings on inherited 'master prints' Later, as the taste of his patrons grew more catholic, he started making daring experiments tackled secular subjects and yet managed to preserve the naiveté of his inspiration, the vivacity of his colours and the peculiarly Orissan exuberance of ornamentation

A Lady with a Violin' with the amplitude of its design indicates that the artist was essentially a muralist The painting was done on newspaper, after giving the surface a white coating and the outlines drawn with brush in ochre and black The



*Vastraharana'—a pat from Puri*
*Courtesy Prof D P Ghosh, Calcutta*

'Vastraharana on stiffened cloth, is from an artist whose works are remarkable for meticulous detail and refined lines

The Sharava'—*a peculiar creature mentioned in the Puranas'* is apparently a popular subject he can also be seen frequently on house walls Some of the refinement and the traditional motifs of the pats' from Puri are to be found on the circular playing cards of Orissa

# On Mud-Walls in Mithila

Mithila is roughly the area covered by the districts of Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur, parts of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Saharsa, and the four southern districts in the Kingdom of Nepal 'Maithili' is a distinct literary language and Mithila has an artistic tradition of its own as represented by the paintings done on mud walls by its village women

There is the 'Aripan' — similar to West Bengal's 'Alpana'— of geometrical and decorative patterns described with a white paste prepared out of finely ground rice But more important is the painting done on mud walls — in affluent homes nowadays on brick walls — with homemade colours from cinnabar, orpiment and vegetable matter, mixed with oil, water and milk, and applied with the 'Pihua', a brush made out of rag or with grass Lamp black is used for dark shading , the sticky core of the wood apple is mixed as a fastener

Favourite subjects are various gods and goddesses, besides floral and ornamental patterns and animal forms, executed at the entrance, on the walls of a corridor or of the 'Gosain Ghar' where the family deity is worshipped Festivals like the Chhath', the Chauth Chand i e the fourth day of the Hindu month of Bhadra' (August September) and the Devatthan Ekadasi' provide the main occasions for the painting

But there is hardly anything to surpass the intricacy and the exuberance of the de



*On the walls of a 'Gosain Ghar*
*From a village in Mithila*



*A Kowar Design from Mithila*

signs done inside a Kowar — the bridal chamber at the bride's home where the newly married couple resides for at least one week and the Purhar — an oil lamp — is kept burning throughout the day and night for the entire period Some of the designs were originally meant to interpret physiological facts and executed with considerable candour

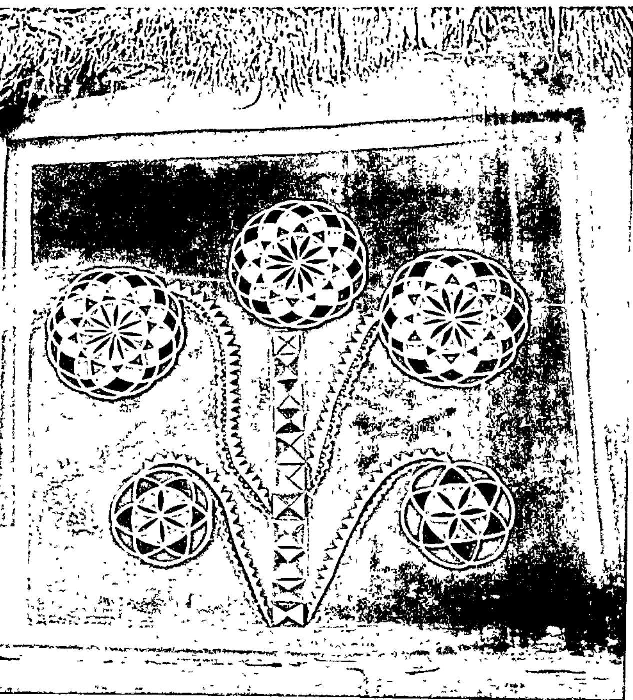
# The Art of the Santali and Saoras

Painting is not common among the tribal people of India, but the Santals who are widely scattered among the forests of Bengal Bihar and Orissa and the Saoras who live in the beautiful hills of Koraput and Ganjam, build their houses with thick mud walls which provide a 'canvas for some remarkable wall paintings

The Santal paintings which reflect the natural vivacity of the tribal spirit are geometrical done by women and their strangeness makes them unusually fascinating They may once have symbolized material objects their purpose today is essentially aesthetic — to make the Santal cottage a more cheerful place to live in or to give it a new look before a wedding or the great festivals of Danga and Saharai

The special charm of Santal painting lies in the total absence of self-consciousness in the simplicity of its vision The resultant product is perhaps art in its most elementary form and for that very reason replete with vitality

While the Santals paint on a white background the Saoras work on walls washed with a red clay in paints made of white rice powder or black ash The pictures are painted in honour of the dead to avert disease, and to celebrate certain festivals They are especially interesting as being inspired by dreams and so portraying what the artist has visualised about life here after They are regarded as 'alive', full of magic, and are made for use rather than for display They are not intended to make a house more cheerful in fact it is desirable that human beings should not look at them they are intended to flatter the gods demons and ghosts who might otherwise attack the home This accounts for the crowded character of some of them for symmetry and balance are less important than the need to include every item that might please the denizens of the other world They are specially important as the record of Saora dreams their eschatological hopes and fears and the dramatization of their theological beliefs

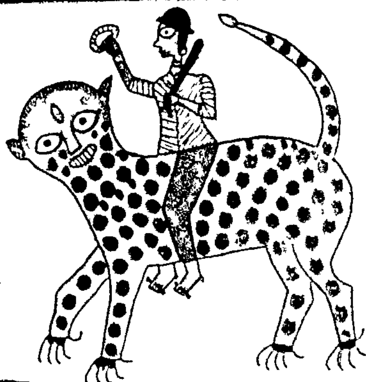


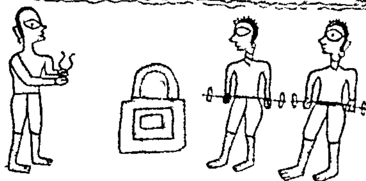
*Adivasi Wall Painting*
*Singhbhum, Bihar*

# The Magic Scroll of the 'Jadu-Patua'

The 'Jadu Patuas' or the 'Duari Patuas' ('Jadu'—literally magic, 'Duari'— those who wait at the door) are a community of painters still found in Midnapur, Bankura, Birbhum and Manbhum in West Bengal, and Singhbhum and the Santal Parganas in Bihar They make a living by going from village to village inhabited by the Santals with pictures on long scrolls of paper, painted nowadays with bazar colours They show these and tell the story

The scrolls stem from an old tradition of 'Paralaukik-Chitra' i e the picture of a dead person enjoying earthly comforts in the world hereafter After a death in a village home, the Duari Patua' would appear with a 'painting' of the deceased complete in every respect except for the iris of the eyes The implication was that the dead person was wandering blindly in the other world when his eye-sight could easily be restored for a small consi deration The dead man's relatives would







*'Baghut Bonga',*
*Santal 'pat' Bihar*
*Courtesy Dr Verrier Elwin*



*D gay Sa tal pat West Bengal*
*Cot rtesy Jogesh Cl a dra Museum*
*Bangiya Sal tya Parisat Vishnupur*

provide the patua with a little money or some articles of daily use for transmission to the deceased whereupon the patua would do the Chakshudana i e restore the sight by filling in the iris of the eyes on the paintings.

The practice gradually ceased to be so exclusively funereal the subject list was expanded to include pleasanter scenes from life — feasting music and dancing illustrations of folk lore Santal versions of Hindu religious legends and sometimes assumed the levity of comic-strips The Baghut Bonga depicted here is the Tiger God of the Santals while the Dongay is the mixed dancing of the entire village community after a hunt — in which inci dentally bows and arrows are used — to promote greater fertility of the soil

# On House-Walls in Uttar Pradesh

Much of the colour of life has today gone from the cities under the impact of a modern industrial civilization But in some of the ancient cities of Uttar Pradesh and beyond them on the roads that link the still unsophisticated townships together some of the old colours and patterns persist

Take for instance Banaras and its out skirts The walls of the numerous temples dharam shalas (free guest houses for pilgrims) akharas (wrestling arenas) and even many humble homes are gaily painted with what look like huge prints composed in bold lines and filled with vivid colours There is much that is trite and some fail to please but not all can be rejected as the commercial efforts of an urban painter when we consider the reasons for such artistic activity and the code that governs it

Paintings are executed on house-walls to mark a mundan i e the shaving of the head for the first time when the child is five seven or nine months old a marriage an important social celebration or just to welcome an honoured guest The painters are the kumbhars — potters who also make images and painted pottery The idea is to give the home a brighter look and a definite stamp of respectability

*House Wall Painting*
*Uttar Pradesh*



In the old days the colours used were made at home now of course bazar colours are used The preference is for bright colours they are rarely mixed and there is very little shading There are no stencils a preliminary sketch in bare out lines is sometimes drawn with a chalk But the experts with years of experience paint the images straightaway with the brush their sense of colour and proportions rarely failing them Modern drawings are discouraged characters from the religious legends predominate There are also floral patterns birds and animals soldiers riding out to battle or on guard duty Even national leaders are allowed occasionally to appear But anything that would depict cheap humour or suggest modern glamour is invariably treated as reflecting poor taste There are minor variations in style according to the social status of the patron and the locality he stays in

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# The Spirit of the Himalayas

The hill states of the Punjab Himalayas now merged in the Himachal Pradesh with Kangra in East Punjab were with a few exceptions founded by princes of Rajput blood Thirtyeight principalities once flourished in the fertile valleys flanked by high hills thick forests and placid mountain lakes The area measuring barely two hundred miles in length and one hundred miles in width has yielded about fifty thousand paintings apart from those scattered by time and irretrievably lost to us

Painting in the Punjab Himalayas is often regarded as an offshoot of the art that developed on the plains — which is not wholly correct There was for instance a local tradition of fresco painting which had originally trickled in from the Buddhist monasteries of Western Tibet However the contact with the plains was close and continuous before the Mughals occupied Delhi and the Punjab and cut the hill potentates off from their kinsmen in Rajasthan The affinities between primitive Rajasthan paintings and early Basohli (one of the states) art confirm this close relationship

When the Mughal power began to disintegrate in the middle of the 18th century people started trekking out from Delhi and the surrounding areas for the provincial centres Among them were merchants



*Todi Ragini Kotah*
*Courtesy National Museum of India New Delhi*

'Women Flying Kites', Kulu
Courtesy National Museum
of India, New Delhi.



craftsmen and artists, interested in the peaceful pursuit of their avocations. Many went to the Punjab Hill States where they were well received by the rulers.

'Pahari' painting thus developed rapidly, aided by the fine workmanship of the refugee artists from the Mughal capital. At its peak at the end of the 18th century, it was undeniably a princely art. Yet there were artists who painted for the delight of the common people. The Kulu Valley, for instance, in addition to its sophisticated and refined art, developed a folk style in which the colouring was simple and soft, contrasts few and the overall effect very pleasing. Mandi too had a strong folk tradition.

The 'Pahari' painter drew his inspiration



*Part of a scroll Kulu*
*Courtesy Bharat Kala*
*Bhavan Banaras*

from the Hindu epics religious legends as well as popular folk stories — as much as his counterpart on the plains His painting however was characterized by a sensitive appreciation of the sub-Himalayan land scape and the flowering and romantic countryside

Of the paintings reproduced here *Todi Ragini* and *Women Flying Kites* reveal the lyrical grace and the delicate senti ments of the Pahari artist and his *aban don* in the portrayal of women The scroll also from Kulu tells us about the wars and exploits of a hill chieftain It takes us to a dreamland peopled by the distinct ethnic type of Kulu with their short stature bright fair faces and colourful costumes

# In Romantic Rajasthan

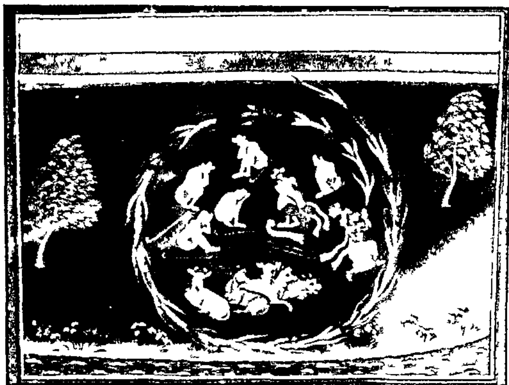
They fought innumerable wars in ancient Rajasthan often amongst themselves to establish their little kingdoms later to hold their own against external aggressors Two essentially feudal qualities emerged from this constant participation in war fare — chivalry and a deep regard for the honour of the clan These coupled with the tender feelings of the soldier for the sweetheart he had left behind at home were the favourite themes of the bards of Rajasthan and perennial sources of ins piration to the Rajasthani artist

At another level yet no less important was the great Vaishnava revival of the 15th century which appealed to prince and peasant alike and proclaimed that the path to salvation lay in the worship of Krishna Episodes from the life of the blue God particularly His amours with the milk maids proved to be a powerful inspiration for a great deal of artistic activity

Painting in Rajasthan developed in three phases The parent style was that of the illuminated Jain manuscripts of the 14th and 15th century from geographically contiguous Gujerat The local genius of Rajasthan developed when the Mughal



*'Rāsa Mandala', Marwar, Rajasthan*
*Courtesy National Museum of India, New Delhi*



*'Krishna Eating Forest Fire, Mewar Rajasthan*
*(Courtesy Prince of Wales Museum of Western India Bombay)*

school of painting came into contact with the parent Gujerati style at the end of the 16th century Yet in a way this 17th century Rajasthani art was the pictorial analogue of the contemporary Brajabhasa poetry with its fervent devotion for Krishna The composition was simple and the treatment less sophisticated than that in Mughal paintings

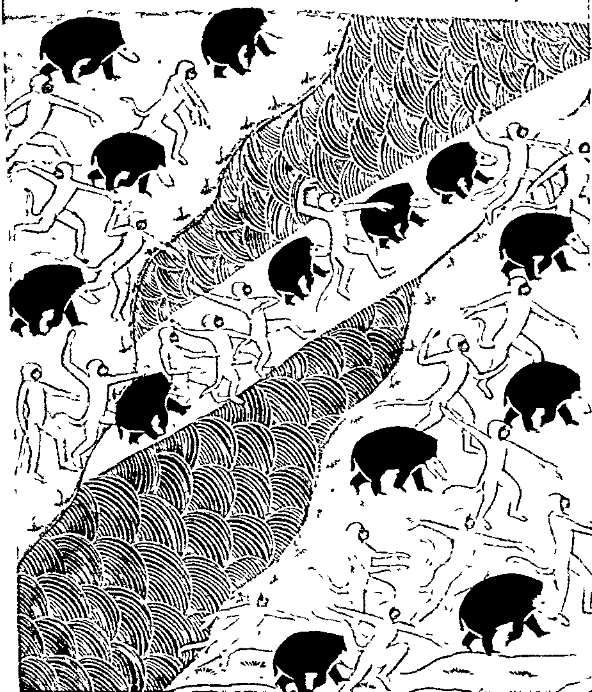
In another hundred years as the Rajasthani princes became the satellites of the Mughals the Mughal style swamped that of Rajasthan which almost became a provincial variety of the imperial school The indigenous ideals reasserted themselves as the Mughal power started disintegrating in the second half of the 18th century to create a new Rajasthani art which continued in full vigour for about seventyfive years until progressive attrition set in under the impact of a modern age

Painting in Rajasthan developed primarily under feudal patronage But there were also many anonymous painters who painted for a distinctly plebeian clientele and as the late 17th and 18th century examples reproduced here will indicate some of the output based on folk traditions and inspired by folk ballads was indeed fascinating



*Rama and his brothers playing Changaan (Polo) Bikaner Rajasthan*

*Courtesy National Museum of India New Delhi*



*'Setu Bandh', Mewar, Rajasthan*
*Courtesy Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras*

# From Western India

In Gujerat the Jain community played a very important role in the development of art including painting The tradition that had grown up over the ages in Gujerat was that the nobility and the moneyed classes *should establish libraries — Jain Gyana* Bhandars (literally storehouses of knowledge) — *which they did in large numbers* They also commissioned artists to produce illuminated versions of the Jain sacred texts for these libraries on palm leaf paper or cloth and bound occasionally with wooden covers Even these manuscript covers were works of exquisite draftsmanship

This mediaeval idiom of manuscript illustration served Jain and Hindu religious texts equally well and even extended to secular compositions A cultured and affluent middle-class which flourished on commerce gradually took over the patronage of art from the nobility The quality of the *pictorial idiom was probably lowered as* the new emphasis was on narrative skill *and fluent execution Yet the earlier deco-*rative tradition was not thrown overboard and from the time of Akbar onward as foreign motifs started flowing in the trend was towards a harmonious blending of Indian and alien elements

Apart from commissioned works paintings were produced for a popular market Some of these reflected the life of the



*A Procession Part of a Western Indian scroll*
*Courtesy National Museum of India New Delhi*

ordinary people who crowded to the many centres of pilgrimage in Gujerat offered glimpses into domestic interiors and interesting commentaries on dress and living habits The reproductions here are of early 19th century items The Royal Procession is a rather nostalgic recollection of old pomp and pageantry But the Market Scene in its iconography and atmosphere truly represents contemporary Gujerat as seen by an ordinary artist who had incidentally, retained the old *penchant* for decorative borders and brilliant colour schemes



*A Market Scene Part of a Western Indian scroll*

*Courtesy National Museum of India New Delhi*



*Wall Painting Saurashtra*

# 'Shilawat' of Saurashtra

Sihore an ancient and picturesque city in Saurashtra was once the chief city of the rulers of Bhavnagar State now merged in Gujerat

The Bhavnagar rulers often fought with the Kathi Chieftains of Chital Tana and Patna in the years 1793 96 A D The skir mishes between feudal overlords and re calcitrant feudatories were not fought over noble principles nor did they produce any saga of heroism

Probably there were a few witnesses certainly some local artists who saw the feudal levies and mercenaries march out Or else aided by local raconteurs and a lively imagination they were able to record their impressions of all the fuss created over sporadic warfares on the walls of the Darbargadh —the old palace at Sihore— in the early 19th century

They executed the frescos with vigour



*Wall Painting Saurashtra*

covering large areas in vivid water colours, painting the rulers, soldiers and politicians with a keen eye for detail, and for varying moods and tempos Their indigenous style of painting was known as the 'Shilawat' style and was once popular throughout Saurashtra

The frescos do not exist any more even in bare outline, except as replicas on some old playing cards But even today, in Jamnagar and Dwarka, Junagadh and Palitana, on the walls of old residential buildings and even on mud walls, one comes across huge paintings on mythological subjects and particularly the Krishna legends, executed in bright colours and some of the old lines The walls of the hillocks near Palitana also provided the rural artists with a free and wide canvas, to paint on mythological themes and to record their impressions of village life

# Art ın Astrology

An astrologıcal chart has always been consıdered an ımportant document ın Indıa Though drawn up at the tıme of ıts subject s bırth ıt ıs supposed to outlıne hıs career wıth bıographıcal fidelıty And ın the old days ıt was not only an elaborate forecast but for those who could afford ıt — a work of art as for example ın Maharashtra

Wrıtten and ıllustrated on handmade paper the ıllumınated horoscope was a substantıal volume wıth the text ın Sanskrıt The sun the moon the major planets and the sıgns of the Zodıac were depıcted on the chart strıctly as descrıbed ın the Jyotısh-Shastras — authorıtatıve astrologıcal texts

The reproductıons here are from late 16th century examples from Satara Maharashtra Kumbha ıs Aquarıus — the eleventh sıgn of the Zodıac Kanya ıs Vırgo — the sıxth sıgn The paıntıngs ındıcate a hıghly developed rural culture and a typıcally Marathı way of handlıng the brush Some of the human types ın the ıllustratıons were so representatıve of the tımes that a fully laıd out astrologıcal chart could be consıdered an ınterestıng socıal document

Thıs form of paıntıng became extınct about a hundred and fifty years ago and the few extant examples are wıth prıvate collectors and ancıent famılıes They are ıncıdentally the works of unknown astrologers and artısts who gave all theır thoughts to theır clıents and to the work at hand, and dıd not even bother to leave theır own names anywhere on the charts




*Kumbha: Astrological Painting Deccan*
*Courtesy Sri. D. G. Kelkar, Poona*



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*Kanya Astrological Paint ng Deccan*
*Courtesy Sri D G Kelkar Poona*



*Saraswaty' Pratisthana Painting
Godavari Plateau Deccan
Courtesy Sri D G Kelkar Poona*

# Paintings of Pratisthana

Paithan now an obscure township in Marathawada on the Godavari plateau was once 'Pratisthana — the imperial capi tal of the Satavahanas who ruled in the post Mauryan period until the end of the 2nd century A D We never hear of Pratis thana as a great capital afterwards It was however a pilgrim centre of some importance and centuries later Paithan became famous for its savants whose opinion the Maratha Peshwas of the 18th century sought and valued on intri cate social questions

Paithan in the 17th century was also the home of a peculiar folk style of painting with remarkable originality and boldness of brush work It is difficult to speak with

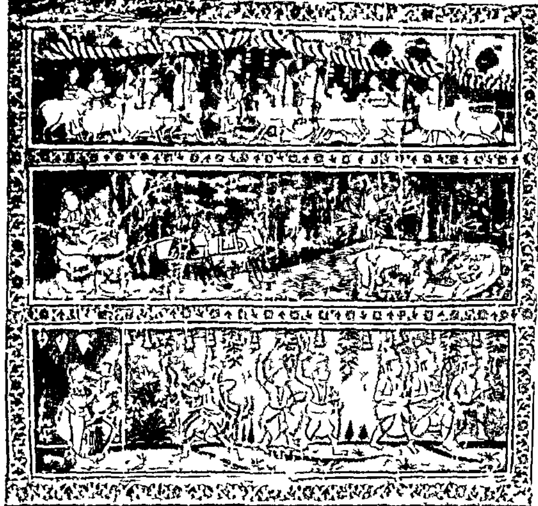


*An Episode from the Mahabharata*
*Pratisthana Painting Godavari*
*Plateau Deccan*
*Courtesy Sri D G Kelkar Poona*

any degree of accuracy on the point but the paintings very likely originated as mementos for pilgrims returning home from Paithan

The style in any case is a fusion of the art of the miniaturist with that of the temple muralist and the angularities of the drawing indicate a kinship with not too distant Ellora

The subjects treated were from Hindu religious legends and the epics though once in a while the Paithan artist would depict village belles attending to their daily chores and other scenes from village life



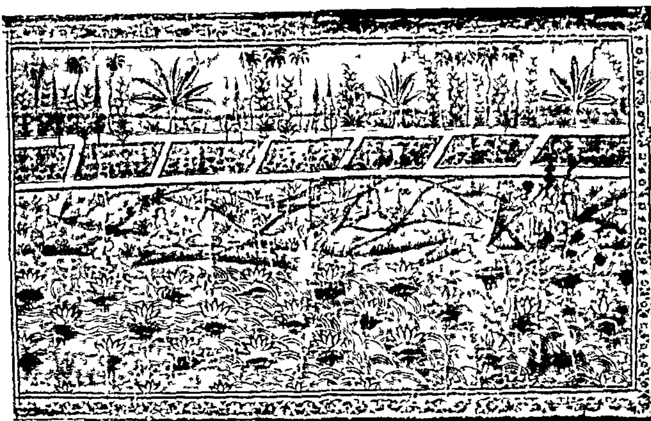
*Episodes from Krishna's Life*
*From a Southern scroll*
*Courtesy National Museum of India New Delhi*

# A Southern Synthesis

At the zenith of their power the Marathas marched into Delhi in the middle of the 18th century Nearly the whole of North Western India and the entire Deccan to its southernmost point came under their domination

The warriors had little artistic tradition of their own Their requirements were met by paintings produced in Rajasthan for export to the Maratha states later there was even a migration of Rajasthani artists to Gwalior Indore Baroda and Poona They produced many paintings — Maratha in costume and to some extent in iconography but Rajasthani in overall character

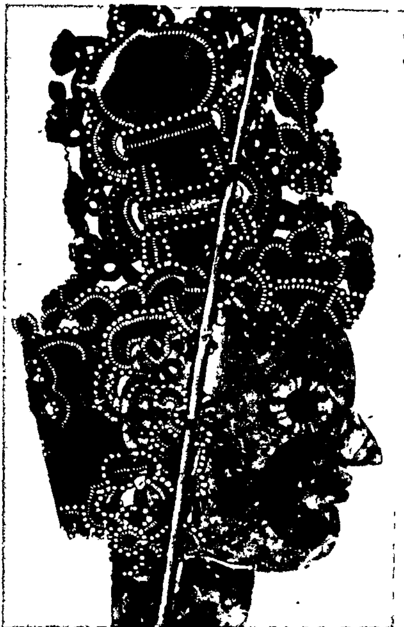
The state of affairs however was different south of the Vindhyas There was a distinct tradition of Islamic painting in the Deccan — a product of luxury and ease developed under the Deccan Sultanates Mughal painting influenced Deccani painting in its later phases By the end of the 17th century when the Rajput forces



*Lad es uith p tchers at a lotus pool*
*From a So thern scroll*
*Courtesy National Mi sei n of I d a*
*New Delh*

sojourned in the Deccan with the army of Aurangzeb there was a further fusion —of Rajasthani Mughal and Deccani traditions

Something like a Maratha school developed below the Vindhyas with very heterogeneous features and it was not surprising that even in folk paintings of the period done at points as far apart as Tanjore and Kurnool some of these features should be noticeable What the folk painter did retain were the simplicity of idiom and narrative skill



*'Indrajit' Painting on leather, Andhra From Ramamoorthy's Art School Collection*

# From the Far South

The South had a tradition of temple murals executed by great rulers, of paintings in 'Bhajanalayas' meticulously finished and embellished with precious stones — but very little folk painting to call its own Paintings of gods and goddesses on the small shrines of Tamilnad and on temple floors in Kerala, done actually with coloured powders, have some of the vitality of folk paintings

But the flat leather cut-outs used for shadow-plays in Andhra and Mysore are gorgeously painted affairs of exquisite craftsmanship The simple themes of the shadow-play, from the epics, have delighted the masses for centuries.

*First Printed* 1961 from the collection of colour transparencies made by The Imperial Tobacco Company of India Limited for their desk calendar for 1959



*Printed by* The Eagle Lithographing Company Private Limited 26B Christopher Road Calcutta 46